

promise me

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by [MelonPalooza](#)

Summary

Shen and Yoshi had Miwa five years earlier than what fate had intended. Maybe that's why Shen was able to convince her husband to go to America. Maybe that's why she's living with her family in a New York City apartment. Maybe that's why she was there when things got a lot more complicated for Yoshi and four baby turtles.

Notes

i am very easily convinced into creating AUs via discord conversations... i am weak

「text between these brackets is japanese.」

Chapter 1: promise me you won't get mad

As she put Miwa down for her the night, the phone rang. Shen bit back a curse, bounding for the phone to pick it up before the third ring. She greeted the person on the other side with a simple 'hello', silently saying 'moshi moshi' in her head. Although it had been years since they had moved to America, it was hard to break the habit fully.

"Shen?" Yoshi's voice came from the speaker.

"Yoshi?" Shen asked. Her husband had not been gone for long. In fact, it had barely been two hours since he left to get a pet for Miwa. The plan was to have the entire terrarium set up for the pet and ready for the momentous reveal on Saturday morning.

One would think a kid would want a kitten, or a puppy—sometimes a rabbit. God forbid a bird, but it happens. But Miwa, the precocious child that she was, knew exactly what she wanted, and it was neither of those pets. She had done her research, laid out all the facts and even made a very convincing presentation, with a tri-fold board to boot.

She wished to get a reptilian pet of all things. Specifically a red-eared slider. A turtle.

When asked why, she simply stated it looked like their family crest. Which was not a turtle, by the way, but a bellflower, but one could barely convince children of her age anything she didn't want to believe in.

「Shen, we have a situation.」 Yoshi confessed. *We.* Not I. So that meant trouble.

「What's wrong?」

「I need you to promise me you won't get mad...」

Shen's heart thumped as her thoughts came up with all sorts of worst case scenarios, running rampantly and recklessly in her mind. *「What did you do?」*

「I didn't do anything.」 Yoshi assured her. *「But something occurred and I need you to pick me up.」*

「At a police station?」

「Wh—no! Just. You know the pizzeria we usually order from? Antonio's? Can you come pick me up from the alley next to it? With the family car.」

Antonio's was in the opposite direction from the pet store Yoshi said he was going to go to. What was he doing there?

「Are you injured?」

「No, I'm fine. I just need you to pick us up. Please, Shen.」

「Us?」

Shen heard a babble. A toddler's giggle.

An abandoned child?

Shen's blood ran cold. Her husband found a child abandoned in an alleyway and needed her help. Of course she would help. Why wouldn't she? She was almost offended he had thought otherwise.

「I'm on my way.」 Shen said.

Yoshi breathed out. *「I'll be waiting. See you then.」*

Shen was the second to hang up. After composing herself, swallowing the anger that bubbled in the back of her throat, she packed a duffle bag with blankets and an old toy of Miwa's. It was a stuffed cat that had barely seen playtime. Shen was also about to pack some of Miwa's favorite snacks before she stilled in contemplation.

How old was the toddler? Was it teething? Could it eat solid food? Was it potty trained? If it needed powdered milk or diapers, the Hamatos had been out for years. Oh, why couldn't Yoshi have told her of the details?

Unsure of what else to bring, Shen left the supplies at that. They could always grab other supplies on the way home once she knew the whole situation.

She took Miwa into her arms, as gently as she could to not wake her daughter. She locked the door to their apartment, and after dreading the fact that the elevator was still broken, made her way down the four flights of stairs into the building's underground parking lot.

Miwa was stirred awake by the stairs, yawning as she did so. "Mama?"

"We're picking up Papa," Shen told her daughter.

Miwa's mind instantly remembered the conversation earlier that day, that after one more sleep she would have a new turtle friend. "For our turtle?"

Shen bit her bottom lip. With a new child, there probably won't be room for a pet turtle. Miwa was going to be devastated.

"Papa needs our help," Shen answered.

Satisfied with the answer, Miwa snuggled into the crook of her mother's neck. With minimal effort, Shen was able to juggle the bag, Miwa and the keys as she managed to open the family car's back door.

She buckled Miwa into her booster, giving her daughter a kiss before taking her spot in the driver's seat. The drive was uneventful, and Miwa even fell back asleep, softly snoring. Shen tried to steady her heart the closer she got to her designation, ignoring her white knuckles that held too tight on the steering wheel.

After parallel parking, Shen rolled the window on the passenger side down, craning her body over to yell out into the alley, "Yoshi!"

It was a blink and you miss it moment. A blur zipped towards the car, opening the back door and barreling into the vehicle.

Miwa was startled awake when the car jostled from the added weight. Her face pinched together at the rude awakening.

「Don't run with a baby—」 Shen was about to chastise, looking into the rearview mirror. The sight made her pause.

A large furry creature stared back at her through the mirror. Its eyes were wide, panicked. Shen whipped her head backwards over her shoulder to get a closer look at the creature. The way its nose was pointed, and the way its ears were shaped were akin to that of a rat. But if this wasn't the largest rat Shen had ever laid her eyes on.

Miwa was looking at the creature too, curiously tilting her head, but not making a sound.

Now, Shen considered herself to be a level headed woman. But this strange creature just got into her car and sat next to her *child*.

So she screamed. But not before she unclipped her seat belt and reached behind her, attempting to hit the strange, oversized rat. She got one or two whacks in, but her angle was awkward. She knew it didn't hurt. But she was desperate to at least chase the creature out of her car.

"Mama, stop!" Miwa shouted.

「You said you wouldn't be mad!」 the creature said, hunching over a bundle in its arms.

Shen stopped. That voice. "Yoshi?"

「Yes, Shen, it's me.」 *Yoshi* said, looking at her once more. And this time, Shen looked back. *Really* looked back to see familiar eyes. Deep cinnamon-brown eyes that sometimes glint red under certain lighting.

「What happened to you?」

"Papa became fuzzy!" Miwa exclaimed, pointing at his arm, which was expectedly, covered with fur.

A babble came from Yoshi, more specifically, it came from his arms. The four round shapes he was holding—green in such a way that made Shen assume he was holding unripened

mangoes for some reason—began to move about. One of the shapes turned around, looking up at Shen with black round eyes. Like a martian.

“You got me turtles!” Miwa cheered, reaching out in an attempt to hold the one that had just locked eyes with Shen.

“Turtles?” Shen repeated. The baby on the phone she heard were the turtles?

The green... turtle? huddled closer to Yoshi, whimpering at the sudden movement of a stranger. Miwa deflated at the rejection, but wasn’t deterred in making friends with the quasi-martian being.

“You’re going to live with me now,” Miwa whispered, leaning close. “And I’m going to take care of you and love you everyday. All of you.”

Now if those weren’t the sweetest things you’d ever hear a child say.

The turtle she was talking to seemed to have liked those words too, turning its head before giggling.

“Honey,” Yoshi said. 「Can we please drive home? I don’t feel safe out in the open like this.」 He hugged the turtle creatures closer, whether it was to make him or them feel better was up in the air. Probably both. The one Miwa was talking to slipped out of Yoshi’s arms, landing on his leg. He picked it up with one hand, putting it back with the rest of its brethren.

“No, Papa,” Miwa complained, “to me!” She pointed to the one Yoshi just grabbed. “Look! He wants to come hug me too! He’s stwu-stw—struggling to get out!”

And struggled the little guy did in an attempt to get out of Yoshi’s grasp once more. He allowed the little one to escape his hold and the two adults watched in adoration as he crawled over to Miwa. She gingerly picked him up, putting him in her lap.

「Is that wise, dear?」 Shen asked. Miwa held out her hand, watching the turtle place his hands on hers. He marveled at the difference of their hand sizes, babbling incoherently. Words so similar to that of a baby—a perfect match, really. This creature was not *like* a baby, he *was* a baby, Shen realized.

「They’re perfectly harmless.」 Yoshi stated. 「Aside from the possible salmonella.」

“*Sarumonera*?” Miwa asked, finding the word strange.

Yoshi looked at his daughter. “Salmonella.”

Miwa scrunched her face. “I know what salmonella is! You just said it different!”

“Well, be careful, he might have salmonella.”

“I wasn’t going to kiss him!”

What an odd thing to say.

「Can we go now, please? I'll explain everything on the way.」 Yoshi asked, turning to Shen once more.

Shen drove slowly, half because she wanted to hear the full story and half because Yoshi wasn't buckled in. Yoshi explained, through all of the dramatics, how things came to be.

There were a lot of things that sounded like it came straight out of a science fiction novel. Things that would have given her pause before. Green ooze canisters and laser gun wielding robots?

But with her husband looking like that, she was willing to believe anything he said at that point. The situation was already baffling enough, Yoshi wasn't the type to muddy the water when it was already complicated as it was.

Shen was silent as he told his tale, allowing the task of asking questions to their daughter.

“Papa fought robots?” Miwa asked.

“Yes. Although I was doing more retreating than fighting. And then Papa looked like this.”

“Was it painful?”

“It felt like a pinch.” An obvious half-truth, but Miwa was satisfied with the answer.

“So is Papa like a superhero? Superheroes get mutated all the time,” Miwa explained. Her expression was even, serious, but still very curious. “Like *all* the time.”

“Papa's not a superhero,” Yoshi said. “I can't have a secret identity.”

Miwa thought about it. “So Papa is going to be like this all the time?”

Yoshi let out a sigh. “I think so,” he said, looking at his hand. One of the turtle infants tapped on it, peering up at Yoshi, as if he was reassuring the giant rat man that everything was going to be okay.

So her husband got mutated into a giant rat man and the turtles he got their daughter turned into mutant babies. Sure. Everything was going to be okay, she told herself. It was best to remain positive in this type of situation.

Well, not exactly this situation—because what were the chances of this happening more than once?

She took a look at the bundle of babies from her rear view mirror. Yoshi was ducked down to hide himself from the car windows. There was something familiar about the turtles. Even their voices seemed familiar.

“You know, they kind of remind me of kappa,” Shen suggested.

“They do, don’t they?” Yoshi agreed, looking at them with a smile in his eyes.

“They’re way cuter than kappa,” Miwa defended. “Look at their round heads!” Miwa petted the one in her lap on the head, the other hand tickling him on the sides. He tried wriggling away from her fingers, giggling all the while—he was definitely the one Shen had heard on the phone. “And look, this one has freckles!”

「Did you know I met four kappa back in Japan?」 Shen asked.

Miwa gasped. 「Really?」

Yoshi lifted his head up. 「You did mention that. Around the time when Saki had mentioned it, too.」

Shen’s smile tightened. 「Yes. They called themselves the Kappa Brothers.」

Yoshi looked down at the bundle of turtle infants in his arms. 「How coincidental... we have four Kappa Brothers right here. Although I don’t think they could be considered yōkai.」

Shen thought about it. That *was* a coincidence. What were the chances she would meet two different sets of four turtle creatures?

Then the realization hit her.

Why did Yoshi buy four baby turtles?

「Why are there four of them?」 Shen asked.

Yoshi opened his mouth, floundering for an answer. He looked over at Miwa, who was still playing with the freckled one. 「The store clerk said that one might get lonely.」

「So you bought *three* more?」

「What if one of them dies?」

「Three.」

「What if the third one gets left out? He also needs a friend.」

“Yoshi.”

Yoshi’s ears flattened against his skull. *They flattened against his skull.* 「The employee was very persuasive.」

He looked up at her with pleading eyes through the rearview mirror. Shen let out a breath, about ready to fold. Her resolve remained strong, though, but it was a close one.

“I like the employee!” Miwa giggled.

“You’re just saying that because you have four turtles and not just one,” Shen said.

“Yeah.” Miwa nodded. “And not ‘your’, Mama. ‘*Our*’.”

Shen smiled. “Right, *our* turtles.”

“Are they from the same clutch?” Miwa asked, turning her head to Yoshi.

“Yes, I believe that is what the employee said,” Yoshi answered.

“So they really are brothers!” Miwa hummed, swinging her feet. 「Kappa Brothers. Kappa Brothers. Kappa Brothers!」 The one in her lap babbled along in the same tune.

「There is a blanket in the bag, and a toy.」 Shen told her husband.

「A toy?」 he questioned, moving forward to grab the bag in a careful manner, keen to not squish the turtles. Although unasked, Shen knew that Yoshi was probably wondering how she knew he had infants with him.

「I heard one of them on the phone.」 she explained. 「Thought there was only one.」

“Ah.”

「A warning would have been nice, dear.」

「Technically...」

“No.”

That clamped Yoshi right up.

“Ooooh, Papa in troubleee,” Miwa teased. Even the turtle in her arms mimicked her voice, although it was doubtful he knew the meaning behind his actions.

Once in the parking garage, Shen got Yoshi’s company hoodie from the trunk of the car, one of those articles of clothing that were given out during those mandatory work events. Yoshi said he would never wear a hoodie, but he couldn’t exactly sneak up to their apartment in a bright blue polo.

“Papa has a tail!” Miwa mused.

“I do!?” Yoshi exclaimed.

Shen opened the back door of the car, being greeted with the sight of her husband grabbing at his tail, surrounded by children looking at him curiously.

「How did you not know you grew a tail?」 Shen asked with a smirk. She tossed the hoodie onto Yoshi, who caught it with a smirk.

「I was preoccupied with other things.」 Yoshi admitted, looking at the hoodie with disdain.

「Put it on.」

「I don't like hoodies.」 Yoshi complained. 「The neckholes are always too small for my head.」

「Too bad, it will cover your fur and most of your face.」 Shen explained, wrestling him into the hoodie. And just like he said, his head got halfway through before it got stuck—but this time it was more likely due to him having a snout now that was the problem.

His ears peeked out of the top of the neckhole, causing Shen to pause and laugh it out. Miwa joined in, and the rest of the turtle infants joined in, too—although it was hard to tell if they understood why they were laughing, or simply wanted to be part of the fun.

After much coercing, Yoshi's head finally popped out of the neckhole, his fur standing up on end from all the frizz.

「Hide your tail.」 Shen ordered.

「How?」 Yoshi asked, brushing down the fur around his face. 「I can't exactly stuff it down my pants, it would look even more suspicious!」

Shen rolled her eyes. 「Wrap it around your waist like *saiya-jin*. Come on, Yoshi, use your brain.」

“Yeah, Papa, use your brain!” Miwa giggled.

One of the turtles blew a raspberry.

Yoshi and Shen then put the turtles in the duffle bag, cushioning them with the blanket. The freckled turtle had already commandeered Miwa's old stuffed cat, hugging it tight. Thankfully, the other three were too curious trying to take a look at the outside world to care.

After Yoshi's 'disguise' was situated and the turtles snug and comfortable in the bag, it was finally the moment that Shen had been dreading since they came home; getting back into their apartment without arousing any suspicion.

Yoshi held Miwa as Shen held the turtles. Although the duffle bag was about the same size as Miwa, the five year old could hug Yoshi in a way that hid his face from the cameras.

They did cross paths with several residents, but none seemed to give the family a second glance. That was good.

Every step of the way Shen expected someone to call out to them, to question them, but it never came. It wasn't until they made it back into their apartment that Shen's shoulders relaxed. It was then that Shen realized they had no diapers or milk formula. Did the turtles... need those things?

Shen looked over to her husband, who was feeding the turtles some crackers. Miwa was teaching them how to eat them, giving them a demonstration (after washing her hands, of course).

From the way the little ones munched on the snack, it seemed like they had their teeth. So no need for milk formula. But what of diapers? No matter. That was a problem for Tomorrow Shen. Today Shen was too tired to care at the moment.

She still pulled out Miwa's old training potty from under the bathroom sink, though. Just in case.

Shen washed her hands and her face, giving her reflection a good long look in the mirror. So this was happening. Yoshi was definitely going to have to quit his job. And now they had four more mouths to feed.

Well. At least they don't have to pay for a babysitter anymore. Silver linings and all that. She made a mental note to herself that she needed to call the babysitter and inform the girl that they wouldn't be needing her services anymore.

And Yoshi's job... Her husband had a janitorial job, so his company wouldn't be hurting with his absence. He had made friends, though, so it was going to be tough for him to just cut off communications with them. They weren't close, but they were getting there. Yoshi was even invited to one of his coworker's upcoming birthday party.

An invitation he would have to now rescind his acceptance.

Shen sauntered into the master bedroom, laying face down onto her pillow. She let out a scream. A long, visceral scream to vent the stress that was building up for the last hour or two.

She came out of the bedroom, her husband giving her a quick glance, eyes full of worry. Right, he probably heard that. With the new ears and all that. And even without them, the walls of their apartment were pretty thin. Shen gave him her best smile, though.

"What are you going to name them, Miwa?" Shen asked.

Miwa's expression brightened, quickly scrambling to the bookshelf. She removed a big tome from the bottom shelf, one Shen recognized as one of Yoshi's books about art history. Miwa shuffled back to the center of the room on her knees, holding the book up with pride.

She laid the book down, flipping to a bookmarked page. *Bookmarked*. The pages had portraits of four Renaissance artists, with their name and a blurb about their work. *Four*. What were the chances?

"I was choosing between these four, but now that there's four turtles, I don't have to pick!" Miwa said.

The turtles' attention switched from crackers to the large book. They probably had never seen a book before, judging by how they all crawled towards it like a new toy. Coincidentally

enough, they all huddled next to a portrait of an artist that made it easy for Miwa to point at and name them in order.

She started on the bottom right, naming them counterclockwise.

Miwa pointed to the first turtle, who was already smiling at her. “Leonardo.”

“Raphael,” she said as she pointed to the second turtle. He bared his teeth in a smile as well, but furrowed his brow. It was an odd expression.

“Donatello,” Miwa said to the next turtle. He outright quirked a brow ridge at her, looking up inquisitively, a hand on his chin as if in thought. Did he understand he just got named? It was hard to tell.

She then pointed to the last turtle. “Michelangelo.” He simply stuck out his tongue with a wide grin that split his face.

“So? How do you like your names?” Miwa asked. All four turtles collapsed on the book, babbling and giggling. They were honestly very adorable.

Shen looked at the time—way past Miwa’s bedtime. “Let’s get to bed, shall we?”

“Aw,” Miwa pouted. “But Mama, we’re not tired!” Just as she said that, Miwa let out a yawn—which caused two of the other turtles, Leonardo and Donatello, to yawn as well.

“Remember to brush your teeth,” Shen told her.

“But I already brushed my teeth tonight!” Miwa said.

“Ah, but you also ate some crackers when you got home,” Yoshi reminded her.

Miwa balked at her father, as if he had committed the greatest degree of treason.

Shen smiled. “Come on, brush your teeth. Papa and I will make sleeping arrangements for your new turtles.”

“*Our* new turtles,” Miwa corrected. She sat down into a *seiza*, looking down to her lap. “I thought they were going to sleep with me.”

“Your bed’s not big enough,” Yoshi reasoned. “You’ll squish them. You don’t want that, now do you?”

Miwa looked up with wide eyes, shaking her head. She stood up, a determined look on her face.

“Mama and Papa better make a *really* good bed for them!” she declared before going to the bathroom. “And put it in my room!”

“Wash your hands before touching your brush!” Shen called out after her.

“Hai!”

Shen and Yoshi shared a smile and a moment of respite as they looked on at the turtle brothers.

It was far too late to be rebuilding Miwa’s old crib—which they had meant to throw away when she grew out of it, but never got around to doing—so the two found a spare cardboard box. It was sturdy enough, and even with a comforter lining the bottom and sides, the four turtles were still able to fit comfortably inside.

The brothers got the memo immediately, drifting off to slumber almost as soon as their heads hit the soft fabric. Shen saw Leonardo’s sleeping position and couldn’t help but nudge her husband, pointing to the turtle and whispering, 「Look, he sleeps just like you.」

Yoshi’s eyebrows furrowed. 「I don’t sleep like that.」

Shen raised a knowing eyebrow.

「W-it looks so rigid!” he whispered. He mimed the position, hands clasped together and rested them against his stomach. 「Wait, actually, this is really comfortable.」

Shen snorted, smiling as she shook her head. She then felt a tug on her arm. It was Miwa, ready to be tucked in (again). Thankfully, her daughter didn’t need a story this time around, content with a kiss from both her parents before she was left in the room with her new turtles.

Once out of the childrens’ earshot, Yoshi let out a cuss under his breath. 「I’m going to have to call Joe to tell him I have to miss his birthday party. I had the perfect gift for him. He would have loved it.」

「I can give him his gift for you.」

「You would?」

「Of course.」

Yoshi smiled, taking Shen’s hand in his, squeezing it tight for comfort. 「And I’m going to have to quit my job.」

Shen nodded, already having thought about it. She could also tell that a lot of things were running through Yoshi’s mind at that very moment, the cogs turning in his head in overtime. He had the same expression as he did when he was human, except now his ears gave away his emotions as well.

She wondered what he could have been thinking about. But she wasn’t going to pry. Not that night, anyway. It had been a long night. Yoshi let go of her hand, making his way to the bathroom. He had to take a shower—Yoshi had used the sewers as an escape route from their assailants, and it smelled like it, too. Which left Shen alone.

As much as she wanted to turn in, Shen had a project she had to put the finishing touches on. It was due Monday, and her classes were at night, but Shen liked to get things like this done as soon as possible. Plus, there were a lot of things they still needed to figure out during the weekend.

There was a lot on her plate, but Shen knew she would be able to get it done.

By the time Shen finished around an hour or so later, she was more than ready to jump into bed and fall asleep. But probably not literally jump into bed, because Yoshi was probably already sleeping.

Behold her surprise when she found her husband in their bedroom, forehead on the floor in a *dogeza*.

“Yoshi?”

「I am sorry, Shen. I did not mean to be so vague on the phone.」 Yoshi explained.

「Yoshi, get up. You don't have anything to be sorry for.」

「I did not tell you the full truth because I feared you would not come. I was worried for the children's safety.」

「They are children. Of course I would come.」

「Even if you knew we looked like this?」

「Of course.」 Shen said quickly. Of course she was. She was the type to invite yōkai into her home when Miwa was a baby. It'd be hypocritical of her to cast away those that were in need of shelter just because they were on the greener side—or the furrier side.

Yoshi's shoulders relaxed at her words, an audible sigh leaving his lips. 「I promise you. You only have to bear with us for one more week. By then, I should have been able to gather all the supplies needed and we will be out of your hair.」

Shen's body felt cold as the words washed over her. 「You're leaving us?」

Yoshi looked up, eyes curious and confused. 「You don't... want us to leave?」

Shen knelt down before her husband, taking Yoshi's hands in hers. 「Why would I want you to leave?」

「Because I look like a monster. Because I brought home four infants, not just pets. They'll be loud. The amount of attention they'll need would be insurmountable.」

「Buying four is really biting us in the ass already, huh?」 Shen joked.

「Shen, I'm being serious.」

「And so am I.」 Shen said, cupping Yoshi's face with her hand. 「You're not leaving us. None of you are.」

「I can't work. Not in this body.」 *I will be a burden*, was what his hidden words meant.

「I already have a job offer from my internship. I can work there right after I graduate. And if you really want, I'm sure we can find you something where you can work from home.」

「We don't know how big they will get. Soon, there probably won't be enough room for all of us.」

「Then we'll move. At night, away from prying eyes.」

「You're way too calm about this.」

「And you sound like you want to get rid of me.」 Shen teased.

「Never!」 Yoshi held the hand that was on his face, squeezing it like he always did for comfort. 「You're too good for me.」

Shen hummed. 「We're in this together, Yoshi.」

Yoshi nodded. 「Together.」

Chapter 2: promise me you'll be happy

Chapter Notes

Now to Miwa's POV! :) It was her idea to get the turtles, after all!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Miwa was the oldest of five siblings. Growing up in a family of seven was already stressful enough, but her younger brothers were giant mutant turtles. But that came with perks. She's probably the only big sister in the world that could play the *very* exclusive game of baby brother bowling. The rules were simple; her brothers just pop into their little shells and she slides them across the hallway, making them softly knock against empty water bottles.

It was the most adorable thing ever.

Her mother was the only reliable breadwinner for the family, due to the fact that her father was also a giant mutant rat. Although he was housebound, he was still able to contribute to the family's finances. Her father was a freelancer, an artist who did logo and graphic design. But it was hard to make a steady income when you can't network—due to the aforementioned mutantness.

Turns out, not a lot of bigger clients were willing to do business with someone that never showed his face. Not even for a video conference.

How weird was the world? How twisted? How could they not see, mutant or not, her family was just like everyone else?

「It's okay, Miwa.」 her father had told her. 「I am with my family, and I am happy.」

But on certain days, she would see her father wistfully look through her parents' bedroom window—the only one in the apartment that didn't have its blinds drawn. The only one where her brothers wouldn't accidentally expose themselves to the world for simply playing, for simply *existing*. Her father would look out the window, expression forlorn.

Miwa knew he missed going outside.

And the way he sometimes looked at his hands, she knew he missed being human.

When she was nine, her parents had used a large chunk of their savings to buy a boxing gym that closed down due to bankruptcy. They weren't thinking of opening a business, instead it was a place for them to live. Her brothers and father moved first, in the dead of night, away from wandering eyes. Out there, they had privacy, and her brothers could be as loud and rambunctious as they wanted.

Miwa and her mother stayed in their apartment until renovations were finished. It was weird to have the apartment so quiet—she didn't know she had found comfort in chaos until that very moment. While Miwa still lived in the apartment for the time being, it didn't mean she wasn't allowed to see their new residence after school.

And boy, did the place really need a renovation.

It was a definite fixer upper, with stains of dubious origins that never came out, thin walls that *she* could have punched through if she tried, and central heating so poor that it left certain parts of the gym *very* cold at night.

But it was spacious enough for all of them and it was home.

So they redid the floors—okay, her *parents* actually—changing out the slate gray for warm wood. Her father tore down the old shoddy walls and installed better walls, sturdier ones, and more of them to create additional rooms. And thankfully for everyone, Donnie was *very* good at tinkering with all sorts of machines and was able to fix up the heating issue. Pretty impressive for a four year old.

“That means I can go to school early with Miwa-nee-chan now, right?” Donnie asked, staring up at their parents with puppy eyes that had the power of a thousand suns.

Their parents looked at each other, frowns knitted with sadness, expressions full of guilt.

Miwa felt guilty too, but her emotions were mixed with a healthy dose of remorse. And it was not just because she knew her brother couldn't go to school. But when Miwa was younger, she would gush to her brothers how cool it would be when they were finally old enough to go to school. *With her*:

Miwa told them how she would teach them tether ball, how to land a backflip off the swings, and how to get away with it because that was apparently a very dangerous stunt to pull on the playground.

“What if the kids tried to copy you?” she mocked the teacher that berated her. Miwa had scoffed. “Well, it's their problem if they can't land their somersault.”

She was foolish. She knew that now. Feeding her younger brothers a fairytale. It was cruel, and while it wasn't done out of malice—nor was it intentional, she had still lied to them. And the regret ate at her everyday. Memories of them fondly fantasizing about their future school life together were now hollow, cold and jagged from reality, digging a deep pit in her stomach.

“The other kids would be so jealous,” she had said. “You guys got cool shells and are strong as heck.”

Their mother was the one to sit Donnie aside and inform him that he wouldn't be able to go to school. She told him gently that he was different—but not in a bad way, *never* in a bad way—from the other kids. And even if they did find an online class of sorts, Donnie didn't exist.

“What! Donnie exists!” Mikey jumped in, tugging on his brother’s arm. “Donnie right here!”

“It’s because we’re not human,” Donnie muttered, realizing what their mother meant. “Papa was a human, so he can still have a job. Basically, we’re undocumented.”

Mikey frowned, not fully understanding what Donnie was saying.

A few days later, Miwa was visiting the gym after school as usual. And as usual, she had to sidestep to avoid a headbutt from her youngest brother as soon as she entered the premises.

“Almost got you this time!” Mikey insisted as he giggled.

“Hmm, doubt it,” she said, smiling at his gasp. “The faster you get, the faster I get too.”

“Nooooo,” he whined. But he still smiled brightly at her, “*Okaeri, nee-chan!*”

“*Tadaima,*” Miwa said, kissing him on the forehead. It was long established that her brothers didn’t carry salmonella. Which was good news for her all around. She couldn’t imagine not being able to kiss them.

Mikey lifted the plush he had in his arms. It was the same plush cat that was given to him the day their father brought her brothers home. “Say hi to Mrs. Klunk too!”

Miwa gave Mrs. Klunk a kiss on her forehead. “*Tadaima,*” she greeted Mrs. Klunk.

“*Okaeri, Miwa!*” Mikey said, imitating a falsetto to voice the cat. Scattered voices within the gym called out the welcome as well. Miwa counted them and was pleased to hear that everyone was accounted for.

Mikey then pulled her towards the study nook, where she would do her homework. As she did her (obligatory) school assignments, Mikey liked telling Miwa stories of what happened at home while she was away.

That day, the family was playing hide and seek, and Mikey was practically boasting how he was the best hider.

“No one said we couldn’t hide in our shells! But I did! And Papa didn’t know where I was! Donnie got found first because he sneezed, and Raph got found second because he fell asleep and started snoring!” Mikey laughed. “I didn’t know when Leo was found, but I knew I was the last!”

“Oh? How did you know?” Miwa asked.

“Because Papa picked me up, trying to look for me, like I was hiding under my shell!” Mikey giggled, the memory tickling his brain. “Papa’s funny. I can’t do that! I can’t be out of my shell!”

Miwa smiled, imagining the scene in her mind.

“And then he walked around with me, holding me like this!” Mikey tucked Mrs. Klunk under his arm. “*Where did Michelangelo go? Where did he go?*” Mikey said as he mimicked their father.

The accent was spot on, but his voice was too adorable to be mistaken for an adult, no matter how low he deepened his voice. Mikey made a show out of it, exaggerating how their father was looking for him, his free hand shielding his eyes as if looking for something off in the distance.

“*My last son is nowhere to be found*, and that’s when I knew I was the last one!” Mikey held Mrs. Klunk over his head triumphantly. “I popped out of my shell and scared Papa! I got him real good!”

“Papa was only pretending you know!” Raph called out from the doorway.

“Nuh-uh!” Mikey shot back.

Raph bristled. “You were laughing! He could hear you from a mile away!”

“I was quiet!” Mikey turned to Miwa, eyes pleading. “Nee-chan, I was quiet!”

Leo’s popped out from the same doorway, opposite from Raph’s. “Mikey, you were not quiet.”

“No!” Mikey denied. “I was quiet!”

“Are you saying you didn’t laugh?” Leo questioned.

Mikey pouted. “I was laughing...” he admitted, before crossing his arms. “But it was a quiet laugh!”

“I’m sure you were as quiet as you can be,” Miwa mediated, patting his head.

Mikey beamed, shooting a smug look at his older brothers.

“Mikey was giggling and his shell made it echo,” Donnie added, joining in the conversation. “Papa definitely knew you were there and only pretended to be oblivious.”

“Ha! Three against two. We win!” Raph said, pointing a finger at Mikey.

“But I’m the oldest so I count as two. Three against three—tie!” Miwa countered.

“What! Says who?” Raph said.

“Says me. And unless you want to help me with my homework, shoo,” Miwa said, motioning her hands in a way to tell them to vamoose. Leo and Raph groaned but walked away. Donnie, however, slinked into the room and cracked open one of Miwa’s books.

“Oh yeah!” Mikey exclaimed, sitting back down next to Miwa. “Do you wanna hear what else happened today?”

“Did you win in tag too?” Miwa suggested.

Mikey shook his head. “No, Donnie said he didn’t want to go to school no more.”

Donnie looked up from his reading, an expression of utter betrayal on his face as Miwa blinked. “He what?”

As it turned out, their father, having overheard the conversation—probably due to his rat ears—found a list of colleges that offered correspondence courses, classes that did assignments and lectures by mail, for undocumented students.

And yes, while Donnie was just four years old, he was very smart. He had proven that many times over. Donnie read over their father’s research, and while happy at the prospect, he ultimately refused.

“Why didn’t you accept it?” Miwa asked him.

Donnie looked at her, before shrugging. “The classes cost money. I can’t ask them for college classes when they just bought the gym. I wanted to go to school with you because public K-12 is free.”

He explained other factors too, all relating to money being the issue, how he couldn’t apply for financial aid or scholarships because of his mutant situation.

Most of the terms he used flew over her head; like she *knew* what they all meant individually, but together just sounded like a jumble of nonsense. But Miwa did understand one thing. To have her family live comfortably and happily, they needed more money.

Miwa got a job as early as she could. She would walk dogs, babysit children, and when she was old enough, work part time as a clerk in the closest bookstore to her home. Sometimes she would even deliver pizza on the weekends.

Miwa’s schedule was very simple. It was school, work, train. School, work, train. She didn’t need to work, but she wanted to. Every dollar helped her family. While her parents provided the money for bills and groceries, she was the one that had the snack, games, and comic book money. Any extra was saved. Class funds, for example, in case any of her brothers needed them.

And it wasn’t like she didn’t have a social life—she had friends. That’s right. Friends. Plural. Miwa had a *few* friends, but none of them were close.

“Yo Miwa, wanna go catch that new Chris Bradford movie that just came out?” one of them had asked.

She had no idea who that was, but the answer was already on her tongue. Before she could reply, however, another friend shook his head. “You know she’s got work.”

“What!” the first friend replied. “You don’t work *all* the time, do you?”

Miwa only gave them an apologetic look as a reply. She never had the time, nor the effort to *make* the time to spend with her friends. She didn't go to their house because she had work, and no one came over to her house *for obvious reasons*.

The excuse her family settled on was that her father developed some sort of illness, an autoimmune disease of sorts. No outsiders. Ever. They couldn't risk contamination. The cover story also played well with why they lived in a renovated gym—they needed the space for all the equipment he needed to keep him alive for another day.

So the Hamatos became known as the hardworking family with a sick patriarch, and as long as that kept prying eyes and ears away from them, that story was the truth.

During her senior year in high school, Miwa was encouraged to go to college. But she didn't want to go to college. How could she do that to her family?

"Ah, a gap year, then?" Yoshi concluded. "Are you thinking of traveling the world?"

The idea was ludicrous.

"No. I'm not *going* to school," Miwa said.

Her father's eyes darkened. "What do you mean?"

That was not the reaction she expected. It honestly made her pretty nervous. "Why do I have to go to school when I can work?"

Her father raised an eyebrow. "You only have to ask if you wanted an allowance."

Miwa laughed, which only made her father's expression even more incredulous. "No, no. I don't need pocket money. I just want to help around the house."

"But you have. You're the one spoiling us with gifts, after all."

"But I can always do more. Help you and Mom more."

"You're already doing more than enough. You don't have to do this for us, Miwa. We're the ones who should be providing for you. It is our duty," He held her by her shoulders. "We'll always be there for you. All of you."

You don't know that.

Miwa never had a single thought of her mother abandoning them. No, her mother wasn't that kind of woman. But Miwa worried about the million things that *could* happen to her mother. An accident changed her father into a rat. An accident could do something similar to her mother. *Or even worse.*

The lump in her throat refused to allow her to say that, though. Instead, the anger of her father not seeing the bigger picture dug its heels into her stomach. Miwa took a deep breath and said her piece. Her father... disagreed.

It was probably the biggest fight she had with him. They both decided it was best to not tell her mother, although she knew full well her brothers had heard the altercation.

「Promise me you'll be happy.」 he told her, and she stopped replying.

How could he not understand that providing for her family *did* make her happy? It ceased her worries. It made everything more *stable*. To have her family safe and healthy was what made her thrive.

The topic never came up again. She agreed she would go to school. For now.

A month later, Miwa was on her lunch break when her coworker nudged her. “Hey look, that new dojo has your name on it.”

“Miwa?” she asked.

“Nah, Hamato,” her coworker answered. Miwa highly doubted that. Her surname wasn't very common. Her coworker sighed. “Stop giving me that look and just turn around and see for yourself.”

Miwa turned around, expecting a joke or a prank, when the familiar crest stared right back at her. The bellflower made her pause as her eyes widened in recognition. The Hamatos were here? In New York? As a dojo?

That didn't sound like Grandpa Yuuta, from the stories she heard about him. Was this her Uncle Saki's doing? She had to know. She was so curious. And if they were an issue for her family... well. She was prepared to protect them.

So on her next day off, Miwa visited the dojo. It was more crowded than she expected—there was even a line at the door. A lot of them left with flyers of some sort, smiling wide and bright. Very odd.

Once she was in, a man in a gi holding a clipboard asked if she was here for an autograph or to sign up.

“Uh... neither?” Miwa said.

The man looked at her with knitted brows. “I don't understand. If you have no business, why are you here?”

“I just want to see who the sensei is,” she said matter of factly.

Several people around her started to laugh, making it Miwa's turn to knit her eyebrows. She didn't know what the issue was, nor what was making everyone laugh.

The man's laughing slowed as he looked at her expression. “Wait, you're serious? You don't know who Chris Bradford is?”

Apparently he was some big shot. Miwa had never heard of him. Well. Actually. The name *did* sound familiar, but not enough for Miwa to question why. “No. Should I?”

A door opened, and the presence that stepped through the threshold made everyone in the dojo gasp. They all bowed, making Miwa feel very uncomfortable.

“What do we have here?” the newcomer asked. “Did something funny happen? Did we get it on video?”

He was right behind her now, and taller than who she was talking to, judging by the weight of his steps. His voice was low and masculine. But it was kind of annoying. (At least in her opinion.)

“Ah, nothing sir! Just this fan that wanted to meet you,” the man with the clipboard said.

“I’m... not a fan?” Miwa half said and half asked, confused on where that notion even came from.

“I am Sensei Chris,” the taller man said. “Proper etiquette dictates that you should bow to me while we are in this dojo.”

Miwa frowned. She only had one sensei. Miwa turned to face him, with half a mind to tell the guy off. But his appearance made her stop, mouth agape. Miwa blinked as she did a double take. He was... white.

She didn’t know there were any white members of the clan. Good for them, she supposed. Maybe he was just a business partner? But why would the clan trust in a simple business partner to train students in Hamato martial arts?

“Still no bow, huh?” He smirked, making Miwa’s skin crawl. “I like your attitude, kid.”

He took a flyer of sorts from the gi-man’s clipboard and wrote something on it before giving it to Miwa.

It was a pamphlet, advertising the dojo. With an autograph in the corner. Miwa was too stunned to refuse it. The first thing that caught her eye was the giant bellflower watermark. The second were the price tags attached to the programs the dojo offered. Her eyes quickly scanned the words on it, making the corner of her mouth twitch.

There was a bitter anger that rose in her throat. Who allowed this? Is this what her clan was reduced to now? To be just... *commercially available* like this? For \$300 a month?

But she needed to know what the deal with this dojo was.

“Can we have a chat? I have something to ask you,” Miwa said.

“I’m a busy man,” Bradford said.

“Even if it’s with a new student?”

He rolled his eyes. “If you want to sign up, talk with Mark,” Bradford said, pointing to the man with the clipboard.

“The prices are out of my budget, though. How about a discount?”

“I don’t do charity cases.” The expression on Bradford’s face was obvious, his patience was running thin. He was just about to turn to leave when an idea formed in Miwa’s head.

“How about we spar for it?” she challenged.

That piqued Bradford’s curiosity. He turned his head to give Miwa a onceover. Probably trying to gauge her level via her physique.

And just as she expected, he took the bait. They got into positions, with Miwa refusing the offer to change into a gi. She could fight in anything.

The moment she lowered herself in a ready to fight stance, she internally smiled in amusement as Bradford’s eyebrows raised with surprise. No doubt he had just realized she had some form of training.

“*Hajime!*” Mark said, declaring the start of the spar.

Miwa struck first, with Bradford dodging by twisting his body, accumulating the momentum to strike back. They go back and forth, with neither getting hit. But she was holding back, and she knew he knew. They both also knew that he was holding back, too.

And then Bradford’s guard had one opening. It was a small one, most likely a mistake. One mistake was all Miwa needed. She swept his legs, making him lose balance. For a split second, he was in free fall, with no foot planted on the ground.

He recovered, flipping backwards under the guise of a retreat. It was quick enough that to the average onlooker, he wasn’t in trouble at all. Even Miwa had to admit that it was impressive.

Before the match could continue, Bradford’s phone rang. Miwa stopped in her tracks. He took the call *midfight*, ignoring all rules of engagement. She didn’t relax until he pocketed his phone again, signaling for Mark to end the match.

“*Yame!*”

Bradford dusted off his gi, appearing nonchalant. “I have to go, won’t be back. Mark, sign her up for the *Ashi* Package.”

Mark looked back with bewilderment, but only nodded. Bradford turned and left, leaving everyone to murmur inquisitively.

“What does the *Ashi* Package... entail?” Miwa asked carefully. *Ashi* meant foot. What does the *foot* package even mean?

“It’s fully comped for the first month. And after that you either get upgraded or bumped down depending on how well you’re progressing,” Mark explained.

“A full month? How is that lucrative?”

“It’s something you have to earn,” Mark clarified. “Not everyone gets it. And it’s even rarer that it is someone’s starting package. I think he sees greatness in you.”

He gave her a smile as if it was something she should be proud of.

“I’ll stop by tomorrow,” Miwa said. She could... call in sick for a day. She never called in sick, so it should be fine for one day, right?

“Oh, he won’t be here tomorrow.”

“Does Bradford...sensei...” Miwa cringed at the word. She doesn’t like how she had to call him that, “not come here everyday?”

“Goodness, no,” Mark said. “He has so many dojos. Not to mention he’s going to be doing a movie shoot soon, too.”

Ah, so he was a movie celebrity. That explained the familiarity on the tip of her tongue. A vague memory of Mikey making her watch a movie or two simmered to the surface, featuring a man that looked similar to Bradford. Action movie stars all looked pretty stock to her, so she had trouble telling the difference.

“But for now he’s here every Saturday to promote the dojo, to get enough students to sign up.”

“So who’s going to be teaching the... erm, classes in his absence?” Miwa tried to be delicate, half expecting the answer already.

The disappointment on her face must have been extremely evident, as Mark furrowed his brows at her.

“Don’t be like that, I’m more than capable of teaching classes,” Mark said. Right. She still showed up the next day anyway.

Bradford not being there was actually a good thing, as Mark was not a very observant individual. Miwa was able to sneak into the office during the lesson, and with little trouble, lockpick the file cabinets.

She saw the familiar crest on a lot of the documents. Her family crest. She saw her name on a roster of *ashi* students. Her pseudonym, to be exact. *Harmony Splinterson*. Age 20. She didn’t want to use a trace of her real identity, in case her family was really the ones that were behind these dojos.

And from the looks of the files she scanned, they were. The Hamato Clan was definitely the ones funding these dojos... but why?

Despite the plethora of bellflower watermarks, nothing relating to the family itself was in the files. Nothing pertaining to the branch families, nor the main one. If it weren’t for the fact that the crest was *definitely her family crest alongside her surname being on the dojo*, Miwa would have assumed this was all for naught and she was wasting her time.

She did, however, find Mark's financial statements and wow. They paid him a lot.

Like.

A lot.

Were they hiring?

The only other interesting document she found was relating to the *Ashi* Package. It was honestly pretty vague, hinting at an exclusive package students could be offered after showing potential. Nothing new, Mark had informed her of this. But the name made her pause. *Ashigarusha*. *Ashigaru*. Infantry. Cannon fodder.

For what?

Miwa found out a month later, when it was time for her to either be bumped up or down out of the *Ashi* Program.

She was, thankfully, being bumped up.

Mark didn't use the term *ashigaru*, but his recruitment spiel was just as vague as the one on the document Miwa had found.

"You should come back at six tonight for the full details," he told her.

"You got to give me more details than that," Miwa said.

Mark thought about it before replying, "Supplementary lessons outside of dojo business hours."

There were so many red flags, it ran a chill up her spine. Everything in her body told her to not go. But she had to get to the bottom of this.

The story that awaited her that night was both surprising and expected. The leader of the Foot, not the Hamato, was her uncle. She wondered if he was the head for both clans. Otherwise why would he use their symbol?

The Foot was a criminal organization, dealing arms for other criminal organizations. Sometimes security.

That was not what she expected her family to be doing nowadays.

She had half a mind to leave when her curiosity was satiated. Miwa never even considered a life of crime. But the pay they offered was way too good. Like, she could quit her other jobs too good.

So she accepted.

It was easy for her to rise through the ranks. She had been trained her whole life. But she was careful. She never used any clan techniques she wasn't taught in Bradford's dojo, and even

threw some matches during sparring now and then.

But she never fumbled when it came to working in the field.

The ‘supplementary lessons’ were mostly escort and security missions. After the first year, she never had to physically handle any of the illegal smuggling herself, taking more of a supervisor role. Sometimes negotiations. Thankfully, she never had to lethally harm anyone.

Miwa... *Harmony* was like a hurricane. She was a success story for the ages. Envied by senior members and recruits alike. An orphan girl who self trained, a martial genius with unparalleled intuition that caught the eye of Oroku Saki—or what he preferred to be called now, the Shredder—himself.

But other than the information that she fed them, Harmony was a mystery. And the clan didn’t pry because she was so good at her job. She kept to herself, but always helped those who asked. Despite being a rookie, at least relatively, compared to some of the other Foot members, she was hailed as being Chris Bradford’s equal.

Some even said she was the Shredder’s favorite.

Through that, she got better missions. Bigger missions. Which only raked in more money. The irony of having the Shredder pay his brothers’ bills was not lost on her. It was amusing. She knew they had... a complicated relationship up to the end before her parents had left.

While curious on what he thought of her family, Miwa knew to keep her mouth shut. But she could hazard a guess, a few actually, and none of them good.

She kept her lives separate. For two years she worked with nary a problem or hiccup crossing her path. There weren’t even any close calls. That was how good she was. How good *Harmony* was.

Imagine her surprise, when on the night of her brothers’ 15th birthday, she read reports of some of the soldiers seeing four giant ninja turtles fighting alien robots.

Chapter End Notes

If I ever write more, it’ll be from Shen’s perspective. I think she’s neat.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!